The Poorest of the "Poo'-Folks."

BY LAFAYETTE M'LAWS.

It was as brave a deed as ever a fellow did, and it makes my flesh tingle even now whenever I think of Jack Saunders. We began our college life on the same day at the University of Georgia, and although I remember distinctly seeing him when he first entered the class room, it was weeks, or perhaps months, before I even learned his name.

In those days Franklin college, or the University of Georgia, as it is now known, was divided into two departments. The agricultural, in which tuition was free, as it was supported by the state, and the university in which there was a tuition charged. The boys who attended the university were dubbed "rich men's sons," while the men in the state department were called "poo'-folks." Jack Saunders, I soon came to know, was the poorest of all the "poo'-folks." He could not afford to live even in the cheap dormitories of the agricultural college, but hired a room on the outskirts of Athens and was his own cook and washerwoman. But he was not a bit ashamed of his poverty, nor of doing any work by which he could earn an honest dollar.

At first, I must admit, there were fellows who were mean enough to try to snub him. If their scorn hurt he did not show it. He was a hard working, independent fellow who, respecting himself, forced the respect of all with whom he came in contact.

That summer when I went with a lot of other university men to Tybee island for a dip in the surf and a few days of sea air, whom should we discover on our first evening but Jack Saunders, acting as superintendent of the dining room—a sort of head waiter—in the hotel where we were stopping. It was the height of the Tybee season, and the hotel and cottages were packed to overflowing with the most fashionable and aristocratic people in the south. I was young and with my full share of conceit, and I must say that it was somewhat of a shock when I recognized Jack and realized his position. But I am thankful to say I had sufficient manhood to act the gentleman when one of my companions brought me to my senses by exclaiming:

"I say, if yonder ain't that pauper, Jack Saunders, acting as head waiter! I suppose he'll expect us to take him up because we were fools enough to elect him captain of the crew. Well, I'll swear I won't."

"Hello, Jack, old fellow," I said, walking across the dining room and shaking hands with him. "I hope you are going to find time to come out after dinner for a moonlight swim with me. They say the tide will be in in about two hours."

"Yes," he said, gripping my hand cordially. "It's right for the tide, but I am afraid there will be no bathing this evening. The clouds are piling up over there," motioning towards the sea. "And I fear we are in for a squall."

He was quite correct; a few minutes later there was a flash of lightning, a dash of spray against the window, followed by a furious cannonading of thunder, and a deluge of rain.

The next morning I was awakened by a commotion in the hotel, and, going to my door, heard:

"A steamer ashore! They are going to man the life boat."

Jack Saunders was the first man I saw on the beach. He was stripped to the waist, and was stepping into the life boat, taking the place of one of the government crew who had met with an accident. The boat was pushed into the water, only to be swung around by an incoming wave, and dashed beamways upon the beach. It was righted, and a second effort made to launch it, greater care being taken to push out between the waves. For an instant it seemed that they had been successful. The boat rode the waves and the vigorous strokes of their oars forced it beyond the curling crest. Then an oar snapped, a man fell forward, and the life boat was hurled on the shore, helplessly crushed. Almost a wail of despair ran through the crowd on the beach, which now included every inmate of the hotel and cottages. It was the end, so far as they could see, for even the most daring had to admit that nothing could live in a sea that had swamped a life boat. There seemed nothing to do but to stand there in the gray of the morning mist and watch for the bodies to be brought in to us by the pitiless waters. They soon began to come in. Two children and a woman—all dead when drawn out upon the beach. They had evidently, when aroused by the shock, rushed out on deck and been washed overboard. These were the first, but we knew that others must follow, for we could see that the steamer was settling upon the rocks and would soon be broken to pieces by the angry waves.

"Won't somebody pray?" a woman's voice wailed. "If we cannot help them, surely God will."

"We will ask his mercy." It was the voice of Dr. Lane, the venerable pastor of the Presbyterian church in Athens, who had come to Tybee with his invalid wife. With the people kneeling about him and his white hair bared to the storm, he prayed for mercy for all on board the steamer. As the prayer closed, Jack Saunders went up to him and asked:

"Please send the ladies away, doctor."

"For what purpose, Saunders?"

"I must go out to the steamer."

"It is impossible! It will be certain death! He can never reach it!" they all exclaimed, and even the life-saving crew—brave men all of them, and I feel sure they would have volunteered had they thought there was the smallest chance of success—urged him not to try it.

"It may be impossible," was Saunders' reply, "but I am going to try."

I went up to him as he was tying a strong cord around his waist, intending to remonstrate, but he did not give me an opportunity to speak. "I want you, Dick," he said, "to pay out this line for me. Remember to be careful, old man, for the slightest unnecessary pulling may cost the lives of those people out there."

"And your own life, Jack?" I questioned, "is it not worth considering?"

"I will do my best, Dick, but I must try for those people."

He stood for a moment watching the sea. Then, following a retreating wave, plunged headforemost into the wall of water. There was a moment's suspense, then we saw his body lifted up and brought back on the top of the next wave. There was a sigh of relief from the crowd as we realized he was unhurt. But he was undaunted. After recovering his breath he plunged in again and disappeared in the bank of incoming water. The people held their breath in suspense. The wave rolled in and broke, but there was no sign of the diver.

"He is done for," said one of the life-saving crew. "No man could live in this sea."

"There he is," some one farther down the beach shouted, as Jack's head appeared above the surface of the incoming wave. His dive had not been long enough, and as he came to the surface he was caught by the next wave and dashed upon the beach.

"Surely he will not try again," some one said, as he lay upon the sand apparently exhausted. As though in answer to the remark he arose, and, motioning to the men who stood immediately about him, walked down the beach towards a little bluff on the top of which a summer cottage was being built.

"You must help me make a spring board out of some of this lumber," he said, halting on the highest point.

"He mustn't do it! He mustn't do it, sir!" the oldest of the life-saving crew said to Dr. Lane. "He will be dashed against the bluff, and that will mean instant death."

Dr. Lane shook his head. There was a resoluteness in Saunders' face which, I fancy, made him know that persuasion would be useless.

When the spring board was in place, he walked back some twenty feet, ran rapidly up the board, made a mighty leap forward, and went headforemost into the seething water below. The next few seconds seemed an eternity. Then a man shouted:

"There he is; I see him. He is beyond the breakwater."

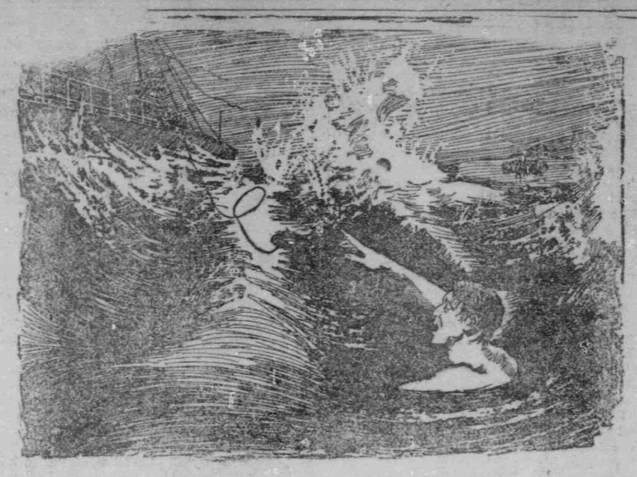
And so he was, and swimming steadily towards the ship.

"Yes, but he'll never reach the steamer," the old life-saver insisted. "I have been in this business twenty years, and was the first man put at this post when it was established four years ago, but never have I seen a storm like this. That steamer is only a quarter of a mile out, but in a sea like this he might as well try to swim ten miles."

"He is the strongest swimmer I have ever seen," said a retired naval officer, who had been from the first one of the most anxious of the spectators. "But where is he now?"

"He is still swimming," I replied, indicating the line, which was still drawing out. I was confident of his safety, although the mist and spray made it impossible for us to see him.

The women and children had come back to the bluff, and, although soaked by mist and spray, they stood eagerly scanning the sea. The men climbed up the incompleted building, the piles of lumber, any place that they might get a better view and catch a glimpse of the swimmer or watch his progress to the steamer. No one was conscious of the chilling wind and the heavy, saturating mist. They only knew that a young hero was out there in the surging waters daring death in the hope of saving the life of his fellow creatures.



HE IS DRIFTING PAST THE STEAMER AND OUT OF REACH OF THE LINE."

There was a stop in the playing out of the lines. It hung limp in my hands and began to drift on the beach. The people groaned and strained their eyes to penetrate the blinding mist and spray. Five minutes passed, but it seemed an hour. Then the line tightened and began to draw again. But not for long. The intervals of rest became more frequent, while the spurts of swimming shortened perceptibly. Then, after a time, he appeared to have recovered strength, for the line drew out steadily for a considerable period. The life-saving crew, calculating by the amount of cord played out, said that he was within 100 yards of the steamer. Suddenly the line ceased to draw. The time passed, minutes seemed hours, but there was no sign. That long swim, they said, was his final and mighty effort to reach the steamer, and, having failed, he had sunk exhausted to the bottom.

The women began to weep and men turned away their faces. There was a twitch at the cord in my hand, and it began to draw out steadily.

"There he is! They see him!" shouted Chambers—he was the fellow who, the evening before, had declared his intention of not recognizing Saunders as his college mate. He was seated on the roof of the unfinished house scanning the sea through field glasses. "Hurrah! they see him, and are throwing a line. He has caught"——

"No, he has missed it," a chorus of voices shouted. The mist was clearing away.

"He is drifting past the steamer and out of their line!" the voices wailed.

"He has caught! They threw a line from her bow, thank God!" It was Chambers' voice again.

The mist was clearing rapidly, and we could plainly see them hauling him up.

"He is on deck," was shouted, and a mighty "Hurrah! Hurrah" arose from the crowd.

We attached a heavier rope, which was quickly drawn on board the steamer. Then the cable was carried out, and the first carload of passengers—women and children—was brought ashore. In the last car, after all the passengers and the crew, came Saunders with the captain. He was exhausted and cruelly bruised by the waves, but after a few days' rest he was up and at his work again. Not as superintendent of the dining room, however, but as first assistant to the proprietor of the hotel.

There were wealthy people at the resort, and among the passengers, who were only too anxious to subscribe to a fund for his benefit, but Saunders refused, saying, courteously:

"Give your money to the sick and helpless, gentlemen. While I keep my health and strength I can earn all I need."

That was in the terrific storm during the later eighties, when the Atlantic coast was strewn with wrecks and thousands of lives were lost. The people who were on the Tybee that summer will never forget that storm, and I am sure I was not the only one who felt a thrill of pleasure when the papers recently announced that Saunders had been sent to congress. Nor can I help the feeling that with such men as Jack Saunders among the crew, our old ship of state will be brought safe into port, however the storms may threaten her.

LAFAYETTE M'LAWS.

IN TRINIDAD.

They Go "Jacking" For Alligators on That Island.

(New York Tribune.)

"I suppose you people that stay ashore think sailors don't know anything about hunting, unless it's hunting sea serpents, said James O'Fallon yesterday on board the tramp steamer Hyades, which came into port two days ago from Madagascar and the Indian ocean. "I think I can show you some hunting down in Trinidad that will open your eyes. Talk about jacking for deer in Maine and the Adirondacks—how would you like to go jacking for alligators? Sounds a little strange, doesn't it? It's a better sport, I can tell you, than plunking away at a deer that stands still and looks at you. When you've run into an alligator you're up against something that fights. There's my trademark, if you don't believe it," and the sailor rolled up his sleeve and showed a long, ragged scar on his left forearm.

"I got that two years ago," he said. "A fellow named 'Jack' McAdams and myself were on the old Irrawaddy at the time. She had put into Port of Spain, and as we had a couple of days off we thought we'd take a little hunting trip up the Koonee river and try to pot an alligator. I had the idea of using a jack from a man from Maine that shipped with me once and was onto the way the city chaps work the racket up there. Well, we got a canoe and rigged up a jack, or bull's-eye lantern—that's all it is—in one end. We lighted her up, closed the cover so no light would get out, and then we started out, McAdams behind and myself in front next to the jack. McAdams did the paddling, and I had a rifle across my knees looking for trouble. It seemed as though we'd gone about half the night, and we hadn't heard a sound, when all of a sudden there was a splash off the starboard bow, and McAdams wriggled the canoe. That meant open the jack. We weren't waiting for any creeping up. I pulled off the cover, and the shaft of light shot out over the water. There in front of us was the weirdest sight I ever laid eyes on. There were three pairs of blood-red circles of fire resting on the water's surface about thirty yards off, and staring at me with a dull, angry glow. Everything else was black, except the narrow path of light along the water, and there wasn't a sound around us.

"Perhaps you don't know what a night is like down in that country. When you first go out your ears are filled with the humming of insects and the noise of water animals, and you'd think they were coaling a steamer. Then you get used to the sounds, and everything seems to get still and oppressive, and all the time you're looking into the blackness and straining after the sound you want to hear. You get sort of creepy and dopey, the night seems to close in on you and stop your breath, and you feel as though something awful was going to happen any minute. Well, that's the way I'd been feeling for two hours, when I flashed the jack on those balls of fire in front of me. They were the eyes of three big alligators, and although I'd been getting ready for that moment all the evening, when it came I was scared pretty near stiff. I sat looking at those darned animals for about a minute, sort o' dazed. The eyes seemed to be coming nearer all the time. Then the canoe wriggled again.

"'Shoot, you d— fool!' said 'Jack.'

"That woke me up. I put up my rifle and blazed away until every chamber was empty. I must have shot up in the air, for the first thing I knew the canoe was over and I was splashing about in the water like a madman. I put straight for shore, half crazy, and all around me it seemed as though a triple screw was working. I was almost to the bank, when a great, black, shiny object seemed to open up like a volcano, and I could feel the flesh on my left arm being torn to shreds. The pain was intense, but I tore myself away, and the next stroke I shoved my other arm into the mud and pulled myself up on the bank. Well, I didn't know anything more for a long time. Then I found McAdams leaning over me and trying to fix up my arm. One of the alligators had got hold of me, and if I'd been two strokes further from shore I wouldn't be here now. Of course, I didn't shoot anything, but I'll bet you don't get a run for your money like that up in Maine. Now, stop your laughing, boy; that's a straight story."